

Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce
Contact: Rickey Gray, Deputy Director
(601) 613-6492 (cell)

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Commissioner Lester Spell Leads Agricultural Delegation Exploring Opportunities for Mississippi

Today was the second day on a four day trip sponsored by the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce to the Midwest to review current technologies and alternative energies which could be brought to Mississippi in the near future. Headed up by Commissioner Lester Spell Jr., this 50 member delegation included farmers from across the State, Agri-businesses, State Legislators, representatives of Alcorn State University, Mississippi State University, Mississippi Development Authority, Mississippi Alternative Energy, and the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce.

The morning began with presentations by the National Corn Growers Association, American Soybean Association, and the National Biodiesel Board. The presentations focused on how ethanol and biodiesel production can benefit Mississippi. "With proposed legislative changes now before Congress, the opportunities for Mississippi farmers will be tremendous," Commissioner Spell said.

Officials continued the trip to Minnesota where they visited a large family owned dairy farm which uses methane gas generated from livestock waste to provide heat and electricity for the entire farm and dairy. In addition to its own uses, the farm sells excess electricity to a local power company.

This morning's presentation focused on ethanol and biodiesel production opportunities. With 66 ethanol plants in production, 28 are farmer owned. The expected output for ethanol production for 2002 is projected to be a record 2.5 billion gallons. Most of the production is in the Midwest and the South has no large commercially competitive facility. "Location of these facilities in Mississippi would result in increased acreages of corn and soybean production and give Mississippi farmers an alternative market for their crop" Spell said.

In 2002, Mississippi had over half million acres planted in corn with 1.5 million acres in soybean. According to Commissioner Spell, “Mississippi has the opportunity to take the leadership role in the South to establish alternative energy industries that make uses of our abundant natural resources, provide additional marketing opportunities, lessen the impact of today’s polluting fuels, and reduce our dependence on foreign petroleum.”